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Croatia

Biotechnology

Consumer Perceptions

2003

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Report Highlights:

The average Croatian consumer has a negative opinion about food derived from biotech crops. The general public and farmers are afraid of growing biotech plants. There is a feeling that biotechnology is something unnatural and food should be natural. The reasons for such negative opinions are various and based on values and emotions.

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The average Croatian consumer has a negative opinion about food derived from biotech crops, and the general public is afraid of growing biotech plants in Croatia. There is a feeling that biotechnology is something unnatural, which together with the point of view that food should be natural results in the feeling that biotech products must be avoided. Although some people have softened their positions in the last few years, it is still very hard to discuss biotechnology with Croatians since many of them don't even want to talk about this subject. Although new food and environmental legislation permits usage of biotech products, the procedures are very tedious and all derived food products must be labeled. Labeling is highly supported by consumers, since they feel it gives them a choice to use or avoid food that contains biotech products. The scientific community shares a positive perspective on biotechnology, but they still support labeling because they believe it is a question of consumer choice.

The reasons for having negative opinion on biotechnology are various and many of them are rooted in the Croatian value system and emotions. Some people say "we should not play God by playing with genes", some say that they are afraid of allergies; some say that they are vegetarians and they don't want to have animal genes in plants, some say that this technology is still very imprecise and not researched enough—thus, the consequences are not known, some say that Croatia is a small country and cross pollination could be a big issue, some say we just don't need it and we don't need to experiment, some say that Croatia is oriented to tourism and Croatians want to offer their guests only good and "healthy Croatian" food, some are afraid that biotech food will destroy Croatian farmers (they will not be able to compete), and some just say that biotech is garbage, and it should be treated accordingly.

In general, the anti-biotech press swayed consumer and political opinion on biotechnology. While our scientific arguments swayed politicians so that legislation now permits biotech products rather than the planned outright ban on them, public opinion is still solidly rooted against biotechnology in Croatia.